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Summit for Social Justice Case Study — Where's George?

Posted on Wednesday, September 14, 2016 by David Rosenn

Where's George?

An online Campaign to Pressure JNF to Provide Transparency About Its Funding

I. Introduction – In 2015, T'ruah: The Rabbinic call for Human Rights, decided to run a campaign targeting JNF-USA for providing support to Israeli settlements in the Territories ar for obscuring this fact from its North American donors.

This case describes how T'ruah chose and carried out an advocacy campaign aimed simultaneously at making policy change and raising awareness of the impact of American Jewish philanthropic dollars in Israel. The two lead figures in this campaign were T'ruah Executive Director and Wexner Graduate Fellow Rabbi Jill Jacobs and Mik Moore, the princ at Moore Associates, a communications firm focused on campaigns for social change.

II. Background

T'RUAH: T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights (http://www.truah.org/about/) is a US-based nonprofit organization that mobilizes American rabbis to play an active role in addressing human rights issues. T'ruah "calls upon Jews to assert Jewish values by raising voices and taking concrete steps to protect and expand human rights in North America, Isra and the occupied Palestinian territories."[1] Formerly known as Rabbis for Human Rights US/ T'ruah's core constituency is a network of over 1,800 North American rabbis "whom it mobil together with their communities, to bring our Jewish values to life through strategic and meaningful action."[2]

T'ruah's methods for carrying out its mission include training of rabbinical and cantorial students to be human rights leaders, amplifying the voices of rabbis and cantors on human rights issues through public statements, development and dissemination of educational materials and facilitation of media coverage of Jewish clergy speaking out on pressing hum rights issues. From time to time, T'ruah also runs specific campaigns that aim at achieving a specific outcome on an issue of concern.

Truah views support for and expansion of the Israeli settlement enterprise in the West Bank Gaza and East Jerusalem as an obstacle to the achievement of a stable peace in the regior and as furtherance of an occupation that results in widespread human rights abuses. Therefore, in line with its mission as an Israel-supporting Jewish human rights organization, T'ruah seeks to mobilize American Jewish opinion against support settlements in the Territories.

The Jewish National Fund USA: The Jewish National Fund-USA is one of the largest US-based fundraising operations for an Israeli group. It raises over $100million per year from N American donors who wish to support Jewish National Fund-Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (JNF KKL) efforts in Israel. [3]

Because many people believe that the JNF US is the same as JNF proper, some backgrour on the two institutions will be useful. The Jewish National Fund was founded at the Fifth Zio Congress in Basel in 1901 to purchase and develop lands in Palestine for the purpose of Jewish settlement there. By 1948, the JNF owned 54% of the land held by Jews in the regic or a bit less than 4% of the land in what was then known as the British Mandate of Palestine 1953, the JNF was dissolved and re-organized as an Israeli nonprofit organization under the name Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (JNF-KKL).

In 1960, administration of the land held by the JNF-KKL, apart from forested areas, was transferred to a newly formed government agency, the Israel Land Administration (ILA). Tod 93% of the land in Israel is in the public domain: it is either property of the state, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) or the Israel Development Authority. All of these lands are administere the ILA, and, except for about 7% of the land in Israel that is privately held or administered b religious authorities, "ownership" of real estate in Israel usually means leasing rights from th ILA for 49 or 98 years.

No longer in the land-acquisition business, JNF-KKL's mission now focuses on the development side of its original mission: afforestation, water conservation and infrastructure development projects. JNF-KKL also nominates 10 of the 22 directors of the ILA, lending it significant leverage within that state body.

The United States arm of the JNF was incorporated on January 26, 1926. It is a separate nonprofit and claims to be the largest contributor to JNF-KKL in the world, sending over $25million per year to Israel to support JNF-KKL projects.

The Campaign – When considering a campaign that has to do with issues of human rights Israel, T'ruah looks for efforts capable of having a concrete impact on issues as opposed to large petitions or open letters, which can help shape the discourse of the American Jewish community but tend to have little real impact on matters on the ground in Israel. One very concrete way that North Americans have an impact on Israeli society is through the billions dollars in annual charitable contributions that flow from American donors to Israel's government, to its quasi-governmental organizations such as the Jewish Agency, and to nonprofit organizations involved in efforts to shape the nature of Israeli society and politics.[4]

T'ruah knew that JNF-KKL supported projects in the Territories and wondered if American donors were supporting those projects through their contributions to JNF-USA. When they sought through to find out which projects in Israel JNF-USA monies go to support, they were told that this information was not available.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the Executive Director at T'ruah, said their staff spotted two possible goal for a campaign targeting JNF-USA:

"We wanted JNF to stop putting money in the West Bank. We also wanted US Jews to think about how they invest their money in Israel, We chose JNF because it appears neutral on support for the settlements, but it is not. Only they are not transparent about this, so many c even realize what they are supporting. Most people who give to the Hevron Fund know wha they are giving to, but most people who give to JNF are just trying to plant a tree."

There was another aspect that made JNF seem vulnerable to a pressure campaign: in 201 JNF-US raised around $195million, but only $27million went in grants to Israel. There seem to be a larger transparency issue at the organization: where is all the rest of the money goin

There was also the fact that T'ruah had tangled with JNF-US before – In 2011-2012, when JNF-KKL was moving to evict a Palestinian family from its East Jerusalem home, T'ruah sta a campaign to pressure JNF-USA to get JNF-KKL to stop it. The campaign achieved results leading T'ruah to suspect that precisely because JNF is a such a revered part of the Americ Jewish establishment, it is not used to being attacked and is particularly sensitive about its reputation.

Finally, because so many appeals for support for the JNF have come from the pulpits of synagogues, T'ruah felt that a campaign asking for transparency about what all that money was supporting would be a good fit for their constituency of rabbis, many of whom have

provided support for JNF and would therefore have the organization's ear if they started ma demands.

III. The Campaign

T'ruah sought three possible positive outcomes from the campaign ("wins"):
- JNF-USA agrees to stop funding settlements
- JNF-USA agrees to make public their list of investments in Israel
- People think more deeply about their contributions to Israel

T'ruah assumed they would achieve the third goal if the campaign went viral and garnered widespread media coverage. Based on their previous experience with JNF-USA, they thoug they had a decent chance at achieving the second goal (JNF-USA transparency). They did assume that they would achieve the most substantive goal of getting JNF-USA to stop all support for JNF-KKL projects in the Territories.

In an effort to creatively engage the broader public in this campaign, T'ruah looked for something other than a standard-issue e-mail driven petition. They hired a PR firm, Moore a Associates (http://mooreandassociates.co/about/), which specializes in social engagement through humor.

The firm's principal, Mik Moore, came up with the idea of a video that introduced a durable character who could be used across a number of pieces for the campaign – in this case, a U dollar bill names George (after President George Washington, whose face adorns the front US one dollar bill).

In the video, a bat mitzvah girl who empties her iconic JNF Blue Box to make a donation tha she believes will help JNF-KKL plant a tree in Israel. George, the dollar from her donation, is excited to support the Jewish state, and is surprised to find himself taken by JNF to the Wes Bank, where he and the bat mitzvah girl discover that JNF-KKL supports a number of projec "This is not what I signed up for!" says George. "Neither did I" says the girl, who serves as a stand-in for American donors to JNF-US.

The girl and George ask the JNF-KKL officials to share how many other dollar bills are being spent to support projects in the Territories, and the officials tell them "That is not information care to share," setting up the ask for the campaign.

"My rabbi taught me a midrash (rabbinic tale)," says the bat-mitzvah girl, "that when it was ti to build the mishkan, the Tabernacle, the Israelites wanted to know whether their gold and jewelry donations were really being used for the right purpose. When they asked Moses, he gave a full accounting. Why not ask our friends at JNF to do the same thing?" They then suggest that viewers tweet the video at JNF and ask for transparency about how JNF-USA funds are being used beyond the green line.

Much of the dialogue in the animated video came in the form of a song based on a tune tha would be familiar to many: "I'm Just a Bill", first developed for one of the most memorable of very popular 1970's animated shorts series "Schoolhouse Rock". Moore and Associates fou a composer to write the lyrics and record the song. They knew that videos with songs were ones likeliest to be viewed repeatedly, since people want to hear and share the song.

You can see a copy of the first video here (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rS2crNL3IKc

The video was uploaded to Facebook and pushed through an e-mail campaign to T'ruah's network of rabbis and other supporters. It was also released at the T'ruah annual benefit an supported by extensive outreach to press, who covered both the video and the Twitter responses from JNF-USA. The budget for the video and the rest of the campaign was unde $25,000.

T'ruah organizers reached out to ask rabbis to contact the JNF-USA Russel Robinson direc Many of them did, and Robinson responded personally to several of these e-mails. Robinso also spoke with reporters who called about the campaign and he met with T'ruah's senior st who requested a list of projects in Israel supported by JNF-USA.

All of this response signaled that the T'ruah campaign was being noticed by JNF-USA. In 20
to keep up the pressure, T'ruah released a second video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fz0ItkNZaec), which more sharply focused on the problems created by funding settlemen
This video also featured George and a song modeled on a tuned from Schoolhouse Rock. Through it, the campaign continued to ask viewers to ask JNF-USA to uphold the "Moses standard" of transparency: in other words, to open their books to show whether and how American Jewish *tzedakah* money was being used by JNF to support projects in the Territor and, by extension, to extend an unjust occupation.

Again, T'ruah used a combination of social media distribution, media outreach and direct organizing to reach viewers with the campaign message: ask JNF-USA to release a list of projects they support in Israel, and urge your rabbi to ask them as well. The second video produced a second round of calls, tweets and e-mails to JNF-USA CEO Robinson, who continued to respond in person and through press interviews.

One day in 2016, Rabbi Jacobs of T'ruah was in conversation with a JNF fundraiser who mentioned offhand that JNF-USA recently released a list of all the projects it funds in Israel an appendix to its 2014 tax filing.[6] JNF-USA had never informed T'ruah nor had it announce this shift in its transparency to the press or to donors. However, T'ruah was quickly able to locate the list and immediately brought it to the public's attention, holding a victory press conference almost exactly a year after the campaign was launched.

Following the press conference, T'ruah asked rabbis and others who had participated in the campaign to do two more things: first, to write JNF-USA to thank them for the increased transparency and, second, to say "we now clearly see that JNF-USA funds are being used t support projects in the Territories, and we ask you to stop that funding."

IV. Analysis – As stated above, T'ruah set three primary goals for its campaign:

1. Force JNF to be explicit about how it uses funds raised from North American donors, w the specific aim of transparency around funding in the Territories.
2. Force JNF-USA to stop using American contributions to support projects in the Territories.
3. Help Americans think more critically about how they invest their money in Israel, specifically making it clear that some of the funds raised by an iconic and presumably political Israel organization like JNF are being used to improve settlements in the Territories, which T'ruah opposes on the basis of peace and human rights concerns.

   T'ruah also had internal organizational objectives that are part of any successful organizing campaign:
4. Raise T'ruah's visibility, increase its power and grow its support base.

While T'ruah expected to score wins on goals 3 & 4 above, its success in accomplishing goa came as something of a surprise. T'ruah leadership speculates that sustained public attentio to details about JNF-USA funding, especially from congregational rabbis, simply came to outweigh the benefits of releasing the information. Moreover, since the amount of money JN USA sends to projects in the Territories is in fact not very large, the fundraising organization may have simply assessed that sharing information would prove deflating of claims that JNF was sending significant funds to settlement projects. Indeed, once the information was released, T'ruah ended its campaign, and public discussion about JNF funding for projects Territories has died down. The campaign failed to achieve goal 3: JNF US still supports the Gush Etzion visitor center and other projects in the Territories with a portion of its funds.

T'ruah did build its lists and received considerable media coverage for the campaign in the American Jewish press. And victory – even a partial victory over a much larger, more power and better-resourced organization - earned T'ruah credibility with its members and supporte

T'ruah has no plans to continue to pressure JNF-USA. Indeed, because they did not expect win (on goal 1), T'ruah did formulate specific plans for what to do with a win on that goal and how to parlay it into greater impact. That win did, however, provide some indication of where

T'ruah might turn its attention next: the list of JNF grantees in the Territories includes some organizations that receive significant American Jewish philanthropic support.

Conclusion – This case describes a multi-faceted campaign aimed at making policy chang raising awareness of an issue and shifting the way the American Jewish community thinks about the power and meaning of its philanthropic support to Israel. The case illustrates how careful selection of a target, strategic alignment of the main voices in the campaign (in this case rabbis and cantors) with the goals, and use of humor can all contribute to a successful outcome.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs (mailto:jjacobs@truah.org) (WGF Class 11) and Mik Moore (mailto:mikrmoore@gmail.com) at Moore Associates are both available to discuss this campaign and campaigning in general.

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[1] T'ruah refers to the territories occupied by Israel after the 1967 war as "occupied Palestir territories" (OPT). However, because the very term used to refer to these territories is often matter of ideological dispute, because T'ruah does not appear to have a specific policy statement that identifies which territories it believes to fall within the OPT and for economy c expression, this case study will refer to the area as simply "the Territories". In the campaign, T'ruah refers to funding "over the Green Line" or "beyond the Green line", but that would include the Golan Heights, and T'ruah's target seems to be projects in the West Bank and I Jerusalem.

[2] http://www.truah.org/about/ (http://www.truah.org/about/)

[3] Donors in the US tend not to contribute directly to JNF-KKL because JNF-KKL is not a U based tax exempt organization, so it cannot offer donors the ability to claim a tax deduction charitable contributions. JNF-USA coordinates very closely with JNF-KKL, but, like many "friends of" organizations, it is a separate institution with its own corporate structure, Board c Directors and operational policies.

[4] http://forward.com/news/israel/194978/26-billion-bucks-the-jewish-charity-industry-unco/ (http://forward.com/news/israel/194978/26-billion-bucks-the-jewish-charity-industry-unco/)

[5] This was not the first time JNF-USA found itself being targeted for non-transparency. In 1996, the JNF-USA was accused of mismanaging funds. According to the charges, only 21' US donations reached Israel, and money was being diverted to Latin American JNF offices. the wake of this scandal, the North American management was forced to resign. Alon Tal. Pollution in a Promised Land; University of California, 2002, p. 88

[6] See schedule F, p. 71 http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2015/131/659/2015-131659627-0d064b64-9.pdf (http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2015/131/659/2015-131659627-0d064b64-9.pdf)

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